

Senate Bill No. 1437

CHAPTER 1015

An act to amend Sections 188 and 189 of, and to add Section 1170.95 to, the Penal Code, relating to murder.

[Approved by Governor September 30, 2018. Filed with
Secretary of State September 30, 2018.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 1437, Skinner. Accomplice liability for felony murder.

Existing law defines murder as the unlawful killing of a human being, or a fetus, with malice aforethought. Existing law defines malice for this purpose as either express or implied and defines those terms.

This bill would require a principal in a crime to act with malice aforethought to be convicted of murder except when the person was a participant in the perpetration or attempted perpetration of a specified felony in which a death occurred and the person was the actual killer, was not the actual killer but, with the intent to kill, aided, abetted, counseled, commanded, induced, solicited, requested, or assisted the actual killer in the commission of murder in the first degree, or the person was a major participant in the underlying felony and acted with reckless indifference to human life.

Existing law defines first degree murder, in part, as all murder that is committed in the perpetration of, or attempt to perpetrate, specified felonies, including arson, rape, carjacking, robbery, burglary, mayhem, and kidnapping. Existing law, as enacted by Proposition 7, approved by the voters at the November 7, 1978, statewide general election, prescribes a penalty for that crime of death, imprisonment in the state prison for life without the possibility of parole, or imprisonment in the state prison for a term of 25 years to life. Existing law defines 2nd degree murder as all murder that is not in the first degree and imposes a penalty of imprisonment in the state prison for a term of 15 years to life.

This bill would prohibit a participant in the perpetration or attempted perpetration of one of the specified first degree murder felonies in which a death occurs from being liable for murder, unless the person was the actual killer or the person was not the actual killer but, with the intent to kill, aided, abetted, counseled, commanded, induced, solicited, requested, or assisted the actual killer, or the person was a major participant in the underlying felony and acted with reckless indifference to human life, unless the victim was a peace officer who was killed in the course of performing his or her duties where the defendant knew or should reasonably have known the victim was a peace officer engaged in the performance of his or her duties.

This bill would provide a means of vacating the conviction and resentencing a defendant when a complaint, information, or indictment was filed against the defendant that allowed the prosecution to proceed under a theory of first degree felony murder or murder under the natural and probable consequences doctrine, the defendant was sentenced for first degree or 2nd degree murder or accepted a plea offer in lieu of a trial at which the defendant could be convicted for first degree or 2nd degree murder, and the defendant could not be charged with murder after the enactment of this bill. By requiring the participation of district attorneys and public defenders in the resentencing process, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to the statutory provisions noted above.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(a) The power to define crimes and fix penalties is vested exclusively in the Legislative branch.

(b) There is a need for statutory changes to more equitably sentence offenders in accordance with their involvement in homicides.

(c) In pursuit of this goal, in 2017, the Legislature passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 48 (Resolution Chapter 175, 2017–18 Regular Session), which outlines the need for the statutory changes contained in this measure.

(d) It is a bedrock principle of the law and of equity that a person should be punished for his or her actions according to his or her own level of individual culpability.

(e) Reform is needed in California to limit convictions and subsequent sentencing so that the law of California fairly addresses the culpability of the individual and assists in the reduction of prison overcrowding, which partially results from lengthy sentences that are not commensurate with the culpability of the individual.

(f) It is necessary to amend the felony murder rule and the natural and probable consequences doctrine, as it relates to murder, to ensure that murder liability is not imposed on a person who is not the actual killer, did not act with the intent to kill, or was not a major participant in the underlying felony who acted with reckless indifference to human life.

(g) Except as stated in subdivision (e) of Section 189 of the Penal Code, a conviction for murder requires that a person act with malice aforethought. A person's culpability for murder must be premised upon that person's own actions and subjective mens rea.

SEC. 2. Section 188 of the Penal Code is amended to read:

188. (a) For purposes of Section 187, malice may be express or implied.

(1) Malice is express when there is manifested a deliberate intention to unlawfully take away the life of a fellow creature.

(2) Malice is implied when no considerable provocation appears, or when the circumstances attending the killing show an abandoned and malignant heart.

(3) Except as stated in subdivision (e) of Section 189, in order to be convicted of murder, a principal in a crime shall act with malice aforethought. Malice shall not be imputed to a person based solely on his or her participation in a crime.

(b) If it is shown that the killing resulted from an intentional act with express or implied malice, as defined in subdivision (a), no other mental state need be shown to establish the mental state of malice aforethought. Neither an awareness of the obligation to act within the general body of laws regulating society nor acting despite that awareness is included within the definition of malice.

SEC. 3. Section 189 of the Penal Code is amended to read:

189. (a) All murder that is perpetrated by means of a destructive device or explosive, a weapon of mass destruction, knowing use of ammunition designed primarily to penetrate metal or armor, poison, lying in wait, torture, or by any other kind of willful, deliberate, and premeditated killing, or that is committed in the perpetration of, or attempt to perpetrate, arson, rape, carjacking, robbery, burglary, mayhem, kidnapping, train wrecking, or any act punishable under Section 206, 286, 288, 288a, or 289, or murder that is perpetrated by means of discharging a firearm from a motor vehicle, intentionally at another person outside of the vehicle with the intent to inflict death, is murder of the first degree.

(b) All other kinds of murders are of the second degree.

(c) As used in this section, the following definitions apply:

(1) “Destructive device” has the same meaning as in Section 16460.

(2) “Explosive” has the same meaning as in Section 12000 of the Health and Safety Code.

(3) “Weapon of mass destruction” means any item defined in Section 11417.

(d) To prove the killing was “deliberate and premeditated,” it is not necessary to prove the defendant maturely and meaningfully reflected upon the gravity of his or her act.

(e) A participant in the perpetration or attempted perpetration of a felony listed in subdivision (a) in which a death occurs is liable for murder only if one of the following is proven:

(1) The person was the actual killer.

(2) The person was not the actual killer, but, with the intent to kill, aided, abetted, counseled, commanded, induced, solicited, requested, or assisted the actual killer in the commission of murder in the first degree.

(3) The person was a major participant in the underlying felony and acted with reckless indifference to human life, as described in subdivision (d) of Section 190.2.

(f) Subdivision (e) does not apply to a defendant when the victim is a peace officer who was killed while in the course of his or her duties, where the defendant knew or reasonably should have known that the victim was a peace officer engaged in the performance of his or her duties.

SEC. 4. Section 1170.95 is added to the Penal Code, to read:

1170.95. (a) A person convicted of felony murder or murder under a natural and probable consequences theory may file a petition with the court that sentenced the petitioner to have the petitioner's murder conviction vacated and to be resentenced on any remaining counts when all of the following conditions apply:

(1) A complaint, information, or indictment was filed against the petitioner that allowed the prosecution to proceed under a theory of felony murder or murder under the natural and probable consequences doctrine.

(2) The petitioner was convicted of first degree or second degree murder following a trial or accepted a plea offer in lieu of a trial at which the petitioner could be convicted for first degree or second degree murder.

(3) The petitioner could not be convicted of first or second degree murder because of changes to Section 188 or 189 made effective January 1, 2019.

(b) (1) The petition shall be filed with the court that sentenced the petitioner and served by the petitioner on the district attorney, or on the agency that prosecuted the petitioner, and on the attorney who represented the petitioner in the trial court or on the public defender of the county where the petitioner was convicted. If the judge that originally sentenced the petitioner is not available to resentence the petitioner, the presiding judge shall designate another judge to rule on the petition. The petition shall include all of the following:

(A) A declaration by the petitioner that he or she is eligible for relief under this section, based on all the requirements of subdivision (a).

(B) The superior court case number and year of the petitioner's conviction.

(C) Whether the petitioner requests the appointment of counsel.

(2) If any of the information required by this subdivision is missing from the petition and cannot be readily ascertained by the court, the court may deny the petition without prejudice to the filing of another petition and advise the petitioner that the matter cannot be considered without the missing information.

(c) The court shall review the petition and determine if the petitioner has made a prima facie showing that the petitioner falls within the provisions of this section. If the petitioner has requested counsel, the court shall appoint counsel to represent the petitioner. The prosecutor shall file and serve a response within 60 days of service of the petition and the petitioner may file and serve a reply within 30 days after the prosecutor response is served. These deadlines shall be extended for good cause. If the petitioner makes

a prima facie showing that he or she is entitled to relief, the court shall issue an order to show cause.

(d) (1) Within 60 days after the order to show cause has issued, the court shall hold a hearing to determine whether to vacate the murder conviction and to recall the sentence and resentence the petitioner on any remaining counts in the same manner as if the petitioner had not been previously been sentenced, provided that the new sentence, if any, is not greater than the initial sentence. This deadline may be extended for good cause.

(2) The parties may waive a resentencing hearing and stipulate that the petitioner is eligible to have his or her murder conviction vacated and for resentencing. If there was a prior finding by a court or jury that the petitioner did not act with reckless indifference to human life or was not a major participant in the felony, the court shall vacate the petitioner's conviction and resentence the petitioner.

(3) At the hearing to determine whether the petitioner is entitled to relief, the burden of proof shall be on the prosecution to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the petitioner is ineligible for resentencing. If the prosecution fails to sustain its burden of proof, the prior conviction, and any allegations and enhancements attached to the conviction, shall be vacated and the petitioner shall be resentenced on the remaining charges. The prosecutor and the petitioner may rely on the record of conviction or offer new or additional evidence to meet their respective burdens.

(e) If petitioner is entitled to relief pursuant to this section, murder was charged generically, and the target offense was not charged, the petitioner's conviction shall be redesignated as the target offense or underlying felony for resentencing purposes. Any applicable statute of limitations shall not be a bar to the court's redesignation of the offense for this purpose.

(f) This section does not diminish or abrogate any rights or remedies otherwise available to the petitioner.

(g) A person who is resentenced pursuant to this section shall be given credit for time served. The judge may order the petitioner to be subject to parole supervision for up to three years following the completion of the sentence.

SEC. 5. If the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.